



## Michelle Obama promotes awareness of mental health care

By STACY A. ANDERSON  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Mental health care is not just a policy and budget issue for America, but also a cultural issue, Michelle Obama said on Wednesday.

The first lady said more than 40 million Americans experience a diagnosable mental health condition- like depression or anxiety- and there should be no stigma around mental health care.

"At the root of this dilemma is the way we view mental health in this country," she said. "Whether an illness affects your heart, your leg or your brain, it's still an illness, and there should be no distinction."

Mrs. Obama spoke at a mental health summit and the national launch of the campaign to "Change Direction."

The initiative encourages Americans to care for their mental health and learn the signs of emotional distress. The five signs of emotional suffering are withdrawal, agitation, hopelessness, decline in personal care and change in personality.

The nonprofit organization Give an Hour, which launched the campaign, has developed a network of about 7,000 mental health professionals to provide services to those in need, including veterans and service members.

Mrs. Obama has been a longtime advocate for veterans, service members and military families through her Joining Forces initiative. But the first lady said mental health conditions affect about 1 in 5 adults, and no one should have to worry about perceptions because they are seeking help.

"Life can be stressful," she said. "Folks are faced with all kinds of challenges. They are stretched thin at work. Their paychecks don't stretch far enough. Millions struggle every day just to get by."

"Change Direction" was inspired by a discussion at the White House National Conference on Mental Health in 2013, following the fatal Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

Participants in the campaign to "Change Direction" include the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, America's Promise Alliance, Booz Allen Hamilton, Aetna, Change.org, Justice for Vets and the National Council for Behavioral Health.

The summit gathered leaders from the government, business and nonprofit sectors for panels on mental health at the Newseum.

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More information:

<http://www.changedirection.org>

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